

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS

OF

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE,

AT THE

FORTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT.

DELIVERED IN THE

ACADEMY OF MUSIC

MARCH 9, 1872.

BY

JOSEPH PANCOAST, M.D.,

PROFESSOR OF GENERAL, DESCRIPTIVE, AND SURGICAL ANATOMY,
ETC. ETC.



PHILADELPHIA:

P. MADEIRA, SURGICAL INSTRUMENT MAKER,

115 SOUTH TENTH STREET, BELOW CHESTNUT.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE, February 24th, 1872.

At a late meeting of the Graduating Class it was unanimously

Resolved, That the usual committee be appointed to tender the compliments of the Class to Prof. Pancoast, and request a copy of his Valedictory Address for publication.

JAMES K. MCCREAREY, *Secretary*.

O. P. PIPER, *President*.

PROFESSOR PANCOAST:

DEAR SIR: In compliance with the above resolution, it affords us great pleasure to present to you the compliments of the Class, and we respectfully request a copy of your Valedictory Address for publication.

And allow us to express our sincere thanks for the valuable instruction which we have received from you during our attendance at the Jefferson Medical College. And may you, who have so long graced the halls of this institution and added so much to its fame, be spared to it for many succeeding years.

Very respectfully,

W. N. NELSON, Kentucky.
J. M. EMMERT, Maryland.
C. C. VANDERBECK, New Jersey.
GEORGE B. ORLADY, Pennsylvania.
THOMAS L. FOUNTAIN, Alabama.
S. G. CLOUD, Texas.
M. F. RICHARDSON, Virginia.
B. S. PECK, Illinois.
GEORGE G. TOPPING, Iowa.
J. N. NORCROSS, Vermont.
H. G. M. KOLLOCK, Delaware.
JOHN H. ABBOTT, Rhode Island.
E. S. BUFFINGTON, West Virginia.
WM. M. WALKER, New York.
THOMAS H. WILLIAMS, Tennessee.
JAMES L. ORD, California.
CHARLES A. BEMIS, Massachusetts.
P. S. GRENAMEYER, Ohio.
C. W. JOHNSON, Maine.
W. B. HARRISON, South Carolina.
A. J. GRAHAM, Georgia.
DONALD MACCALLUM, Scotland.
JOHN E. BRUNET, Cuba.
J. MCK. GRAHAM, Nova Scotia.
J. R. DALE, Arkansas.
J. C. HEARNE, Kentucky.
H. M. PERRY, North Carolina.

1030 CHESTNUT STREET, PHILADELPHIA, February 25th, 1872.

GENTLEMEN: I have had the honor to receive your communication of yesterday, requesting on the part of the Class a copy of my Valedictory Address for publication. It gives me pleasure to comply with their wishes in this respect.

Please accept for yourselves, and tender to the Class you represent, my very warm acknowledgments for the kind expressions with which the request is accompanied.

Very faithfully, yours,

JOSEPH PANCOAST.

To Messrs. W. N. NELSON, J. W. EMMERT, C. C. VANDERBECK, GEORGE B. ORLADY, THOMAS L. FOUNTAIN, and others, members of the Committee.

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS.

IF there be any one justified in indulging in self-gratulation, it is surely the student of medicine, at the successful close of his collegiate course.

He has at this period reaped the crowning result of many years of anxious preparation, and completed a round of studies more arduous, and attended with a greater sacrifice of health and comfort, than the public is generally apprised of.

He is conscious of the merit of having exerted all his powers, in the attainment of an honorable distinction, and of having realized by so doing the ardent wishes of his relatives and friends.

To him, in truth, this must needs be a proud occasion, and it is fit that it should be ushered in with music and rejoicing.

It is, therefore, gentlemen graduates, with peculiar pleasure that I offer you my congratulations, and welcome you in the name and on behalf of the Trustees and Faculty of Jefferson Medical College, most warmly welcome you, into the lists of our profession.

The certificate of medical rank which you have just now received from honored hands is an evidence that your relations with us and with the public have become changed. You have stepped this day, as it were, from one platform of

existence to another and a higher one—an elevation which presents you with a much wider field for usefulness and exertion, and a vastly greater weight of personal responsibility. For disguise it as your modesty may incline you to do, the profession which has now thrown its mantle over you has conferred upon you a powerful influence for future good or evil. It is a profession that carries with it, in the minds of all, the presumption that you have acquired a knowledge of the means of being greatly useful hereafter, in remedying the physical ills of life, which prevail alike among the rich and the poor whenever sickness rages or wounds are inflicted.

Yet the change effected by this day's ceremonial is, after all, only a sign that you have successfully completed your preparations for the greater voyage of professional life which looms before you; and the notes of music swelling forth on this occasion may be considered as the morning *réveillé*, which should rouse you up to new and prolonged exertion.

To your young eyes, the wide ocean of the future must now be seen, stretching out endlessly and mistily before you. To us you seem like so many goodly barks, about to depart from a quiet haven, each one on his separate track, over the wide, wide sea, exposed to shoal and rock and tempest, with no compass but your will, no chart save your diploma, filled with zeal and knowledge, generous feelings and noble impulses—a freight in value incomparably richer than ever was floated by the argosies of Ind.

Can we then see you depart, most of you perhaps never again to greet us with your presence; you with whom we have been so long associated, that your countenances have grown to be unto us like those of our familiar friends; without the most anxious solicitude for your welfare, and a desire to supply you with some parting admonition?

You have enjoyed during the past session unusual opportunities of becoming personally and practically familiar with

disease, in the grand hospitals of this city—and especially in the extensive clinic and hospital attached to the Jefferson Medical College, in which more than thirteen hundred patients, including almost every variety of medical and surgical disease, attracted from the city and from a wide portion of the surrounding country, have been carefully treated before you. In view of all this, some—the least thinking among you—may possibly be led to beguile themselves with the belief, that their days of study and their nights of watching and meditation are now gone by, and that they stand prepared at the present moment to keep the field—like knights in a tournament—against all the difficulties and dangers that are practically to be encountered. But if there be such among you, let them beware how they yield to so great a delusion. For though you have passed out of our hands, to take equal rank with us in the profession, the public is soon to form another tribunal, which will sit in judgment on your merits—a public that will in the first instance be predisposed in your behalf, will weigh favorably your present attainments, especially if it finds you active and studious, but will exact from you more and more, as your opportunities for practice and experience increase. In a mercantile sense of the word, you now go forth from us, with a certain available amount of credit, which by proper industrious attention to the studies and duties pertaining to your profession, you may almost extend at will. We are therefore exceedingly solicitous that you may start right in your professional career, and so lay down your plans for continuous study and improvement as to increase day by day in your medical attainments, and in the confidence of an observing public. By so doing you will be sure to make the outset of your career a pleasant background for the filling up of your after life. To this course you should be strongly incited, not only for the immediate advantages flowing from it, but also for the delicious retro-

spective gratification it will afford you, when advancing time may have brought you to fill the places of those whom you have heretofore looked up to for instruction.

There are none of you now before me, of birth so humble or station so lowly, as to have reason to dread, in this free land of ours, the injurious influence of prejudice or power on his future life. If the *res angustæ domi* should for a time debar any one from starting on a career as fair and full as others, the mind which knows no artificial restraints, whose kingdom is as large in the brain of the poor as the rich, may still be actively employed in hiving up wisdom and knowledge in readiness for an opportunity for its future display, which will be sure sooner or later to come, and make all the disadvantages of rank and station as nothing. Within your country's broad domains, what a field for employment is opened out before you, bustling with ever increasing industry, instinct with life and vigor in every part, stretching from the polar snows almost to the equator, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific; grander than the Roman Empire in its palmiest days; grander than was ever ruled by ancient Cæsar or modern Czar. There are several of you now before me, sitting side by side, whose homes are in the new Ophir by the Pacific, others from our extremest bounds, by the Northeast Atlantic. So wide when they reach their homes will they be apart, that while the former may be watching the sun setting in the Pacific wave, the latter, roused from their slumbers, will see him "flaming in the forehead of the morning sky."

But however distant, gentlemen, you are to be placed asunder, the main object of your lives is to be one and the same. And what is this object? Is it that, which too many at the outset of their career deem the main aim of existence, the sudden and sordid accumulation of wealth? If there be any that think so, his place is not with us; let him go delve in the mine; attach himself to the rotating wheel of commerce;

or break up all social ties, to court the fickle goddess of fortune beneath the sun of the equator.

The practice of your profession, while it is less subject to the reverses of fortune that attend the merchant or adventurer, and forms a reliable source of support, and chance of distinction that cannot readily be taken from you, holds out in prospect no El Dorado, no Aladdin's lamp, no "open sesame" to the sudden acquisition of wealth. But it proffers you unusual opportunities for obtaining that which is, when rightly considered, a richer inducement to exertion, the respect, the confidence and affection, of the good, the learned and the wise. Your business is to be the care of lives—of human lives; an office second in importance to none, save that of the ministers of our holy religion—of the parent's, around whose sick bed will be gathered so many dependent and sorrowing spirits; of the son's, the future hope and stay; of the daughter's, just blooming into womanhood, to form an atmosphere of light and life to all around her; of the infant's, the object of so much present affection, the nucleus about which revolves so much future hope and expectation. The lives of such as these it is to be your duty hereafter, as far as it is in your power, to protect and guard, and by so doing preserve unbroken that chain which binds life to life, whose links are formed by love, duty, and all other blessed feelings—those jewels of the soul which constitute the wealth of the affections, a wealth, to find the equal of which in value, Potosi, or Golconda, or all the sands of all the rivers that ever flowed beneath the burning sun, may be searched in vain.

Keep yourselves ready then and able to discharge so important a trust, to the best of the abilities with which God has endowed you. The path which you are to follow in its accomplishment is a plain one. It is simply the path of duty and honor. The leisure hours that may be afforded you, before you become fully engrossed in the practice of your profession,

cannot honorably be idled away in listless inactivity; but should be embraced as precious opportunities for maturing your minds, and increasing your professional efficiency by reading, observation, and reflection.

I well know in regard to native powers and energies, that we are not all constituted alike; that in some persons these qualities are slower in coming to maturity, require more constant cultivation, more earnest and long protracted study, to bring them into full development. But let such individuals as may seem less favored by nature, and who are distrustful perhaps of their own capacities, but give to the purpose in life which they have chosen, more constant study and attention, and if they falter not in the long effort, they will most probably find themselves, in the end, advanced as far, perhaps even farther, than others endowed with quicker and more brilliant qualifications. At least if they aim high, even if they should not succeed in reaching the topmost place in their profession, they will be sure of obtaining some honorable position that ought to satisfy a well regulated ambition. Let each one adapt for himself if he choose, the hackneyed motto of the eagle bound in steady flight to his eyrie on a mountain cliff. Fix your eyes on the elevation that you ought to reach, and from now henceforward, press on quietly but unflinchingly towards the attainment of that goal. By day and by night let it be your polar star. What fixedness it will give to your aims. How it will prevent vacillation, arrest backsliding, and check faint-heartedness; sweeten the toils by day; add a zest to the studies of the night; and make the petty, evanescent ills of life, which no one can escape, dwindle into insignificance.

You need not necessarily the aid of any patron in the fulfilment of the task I have set before you; seek rather the personal independence which comes from frequent and solitary communion with your own mind; cultivate its powers in every direction; make it respectable in your own estimation, and

you will soon find it valued by others, who will be more or less attentively observing you. It will be a good counsellor, stimulating you to hold on in the work of self-improvement, however dark and discouraging the future may for the moment seem.

I sincerely trust there is not one among you so weak in purpose, or deficient in the steady energy necessary to carry it out, as to be unable thus to fix his mind unalterably upon the attainment of some honorable position in life. If there be any such willing to blight the fair promise of his start, by idling time or wasting it in riot, or dissipating it by regardlessly wantoning without fixed object, like the butterfly from flower to flower, God help him, for great and sure will be his fall. He had better not have come here with you to-day;—better not have stepped out of his chrysalis state—better have remained a worm.

In the formation of your library, I would advise you at first to select books of the latest production, which show the existing state of the science, and afterwards, at your leisure, trace backwards the stream of knowledge, gleaning what is valuable from the experience of the past. Cultivate with equal care, at your outset, the various branches of your profession. Stop not in this course because you do not see the opportunity of applying immediately the knowledge you gain. You know not which branch in the end will most redound to your reputation, and you can study nothing immediately connected with your profession that will not well repay you for the trouble, and come some day into useful application. You will most certainly, likewise, find great advantage, as well as agreeable relaxation, in giving attention to some of the auxiliary branches of medicine. All the departments of natural science will have great charms, especially to such of you as dwell in the country, where you may be able to do much good, by making such noble studies popular by the force of your ex-

ample. The study of polite literature, as it is called, has a tendency to refine the feelings and enlarge the mind, and thus render you the more acceptable companions to the literary and accomplished. Be not, however, terrified at the extensiveness of the field for study laid before you. What the intelligent members of other professions cultivate for pleasure and general information, you should be the more strongly impelled to undertake, in consequence of its usefulness in your calling. You will find the task attractive, and in fact the very amplitude of the field it presents for investigation constitutes one of the great charms of medical life.

When you come to establish yourselves in practice you will necessarily be brought into very delicate relations with many of your older medical brethren, and must of course expect to have your qualifications, your temper, and your principles closely scrutinized, before you will be able to obtain their confidence and esteem. It will be incumbent on you, therefore, to take especial heed to your steps, in order to avoid giving justifiable grounds even to the breath of suspicion.

Be ready on all occasions to do justice to the claims of the members of your profession, and never indulge the weakness, common to feeble and ignoble minds, of looking upon the praise bestowed upon your competitors as so much wrong done to your own reputation. All invidious feelings, displayed towards rivals, either by sly insinuations, unfriendly statements of their practice, or the grosser vaunting of one's own superiority, will be found but bad policy, apart from every other consideration. Emulate and excel, if you can, your competitors, by every just and proper means. If you should not succeed in this honest and noble aim, show at least the disposition to excel them, and the public will not long remain blind to your merits, or be backward in promoting your fortunes.

It is not every one, however, who proves himself sufficiently strong and high-minded, to pay, in unceasing diligence

and upright demeanor, the price of all honorable distinction in science. Some are occasionally met with, who are turned aside from the path of honor by the hope of gain, or some equally unworthy motive, engage in the selfish practices of empiricism and imposture, and make, before they learn its proper value, shipwreck of all professional reputation. All such are sure to find in the end how grievously they have been mistaken. For although experience has shown us, that empirical delusions of some sort will always be, to more or less extent, prevalent; it is equally apparent that they are short lived; spring up one after another, like waves upon the seashore, and as surely break each other to pieces; and that they who embrace them will be able but for a short time to disturb the fair course of science, and soon, if they sink not altogether, will flounder on unheeded and despised.

The duties of a physician do not even terminate with the cure of the malady he is called upon to treat. His counsels are still to be continued, in the hope of being able to lay down such rules for the patient's observance after recovery, as to enable him to avoid a recurrence of the attack. The singular disinterestedness of our profession in this respect, so seemingly in direct opposition to its pecuniary interests, and in general but imperfectly appreciated by the public, is manifested not by a few members only, but, I am proud to say, by almost the whole body of the profession. I at least have never seen and seldom heard of any well-educated physician who had become such a monster of iniquity, as to have his conduct and opinions habitually influenced by mere pecuniary considerations, in opposition to public or private good. Such a being, if met with, would soon have his infamy detected, and be compelled to crawl along, the scorn of all the good, and if he manage to thrive at all, he will do so by preying as a charlatan on the ignorant and the weak.

While I would inspire you, gentlemen, with a desire for

this high-minded and generous exercise of your profession, I would also have you to determine, even if you should not for a time meet with all the encouragement you merit, never to abandon it. Few have done so without subsequent regrets. Let it grow old with you. Live on such terms with it while you are young, that as you advance in life you will feel inclined to cherish it the more. Now, you will need it for your support, and when you become older and more experienced, your services will, in all probability, be held in such high estimation, that the satisfaction with which they are received will serve in a good degree, to compensate for the additional attendant toil.

By a similar train of reasoning, I believe you will find it to be your duty to communicate such valuable materials as you may gather from observation, in the way in which they will be most useful, through the authorized medical channels, and not by the medium of the public prints, which course might lay you open to the suspicion of ignoble motives. Favorable opportunities may lead you to discover some valuable remedial agents among our indigenous plants, and you will directly enhance your reputation, and possibly do a service to your country, in making them generally known. You may also be enabled to contrive some great improvements in the apparatus for the treatment of surgical diseases, and if such improvements should be found on trial particularly advantageous, self-interest in its unworthy promptings might possibly suggest to some of you the securing of the exclusive advantage of their sale.

But recollect that no one man really invents much that is absolutely new, and seldom brings to much useful perfection the little that he does invent. His efforts are usually restricted to the borrowing, directly or indirectly, from others, and to the improvement or new application of that which he has borrowed. This is especially the case in reference to our

profession, and if you search into the history of the secret or patented articles that encumber our shops, you will perceive that their self-styled inventors have obtained all the valuable knowledge they possess, and which is usually but very little, from the free, benevolent, broadcast dispensation of it, made by the liberal members of our profession; and it is, at least, in my estimation, a questionable point, whether anyone has the moral right so to pervert the labors of others to his own selfish advantage. The adding of the little that the best of us are enabled to do, in the way of observation, invention, or improvement, to the common stock of knowledge for the alleviation of human sufferings, is to make but an insignificant return for the precious privilege we all enjoy, of feasting freely at the public table of science, upon which, for more than two thousand years, the wisest and the noblest of our profession have laid with open hands the rich fruits of their labors and experience.

Self-interest, even, if it were not too short-sighted to look beyond the momentary advantage, should give to every one a higher aim; for by assiduously struggling on in the acquisition of knowledge, and the maintenance of a fair reputation, you must assuredly, if your lives are protracted, reach a point of high consideration with the public; and persons, in general, are too sensitive to suffering not to learn to appreciate rightly high medical attainments, and too wise not to know, that learning, worth, and talent cannot long be retained in any situation, in which they do not meet with adequate reward.

The embarrassments and vexations that checker the physician's career, most of you are already apprised of. If time were allowed me, I would like to parade them all before you now, in their strongest colors, in order to avoid any future disappointment on the part of those who deem the greatest

difficulty in life to be passed over with the trying ordeal preparatory to graduation.

With men who purpose to pursue a manly and elevated course, to know the difficulties in the path is, in part, to conquer them. Sore trials, which are to be borne with and mastered, are to be met with in ours as in every other pursuit of life. Perhaps such evils are not altogether to be deprecated, inasmuch as they serve to brighten other scenes by contrast, for life itself would be insipid without some vicissitudes of pain and pleasure—those ups and downs of the feelings—and we well know that the halcyon weather always comes after the storm.

You will frequently be pained with the necessity of replying to importunate inquiries, in regard to the risks which a patient runs, when a sudden and nearly hopeless sickness has fallen like a blight upon him, and be tempted—a mistake which too many are apt to commit—from your native amiability, and an instinctive desire to soothe the anxious distress of relatives—to wrong yourselves by making, for the time, lighter of the disease than your cooler judgment warrants. This would be a great error and ought to be avoided; for the public are not, in general, generous enough to give you credit for so amiable a weakness, and will remember an incorrect opinion, thus given, to your future disadvantage.

You will occasionally be placed under still more painful circumstances when you find your patient, from the severity of disease, or native feebleness of constitution, wavering, as it were, between life and death, perchance with slight prospects of recovery, and he solicits from you a candid opinion in reference to his state. As men of truth and honor, you cannot fail to reply; but as physicians, sensible how much any increased moral depression may weaken the already attenuated thread of existence, and knowing likewise how often the recuperative energies of the system, when properly aided, can

overmaster disease, you should so couch your reply that you may not shock your patient, and yet allow him, by inference, to perceive your anxiety in regard to the result. But, as moralists and Christians, you should, through one of his nearest and most judicious friends, have him, in the gentlest manner and at the most propitious moment, made acquainted with his evanescent hold on human things. Having thus placed yourselves in a right position, you will still be looked to by your patient as the source of his physical relief; may inspire hope by your ministrations so as to occasionally arouse the failing energies of his system, and if it be impossible to cure, have at least the sad satisfaction of assuaging suffering and lengthening life.

You must expect, at times, to be called to patients suffering from severe injury or protracted disease, and be placed under the painful necessity of having to determine whether he is to continue to risk, and probably lose his life, or submit, as the surest means of saving it, to some fearful operation. In whatever way, and however conscientiously and ably you decide a question of such moment, you must not expect but that there will be some persons, so uninformed or so unreasonable, as to believe and to state, that the course which they have seen pursued to the end was less appropriate than some other which they had not seen tested.

The very best of our profession—the most humane and the most skilful—have thus suffered. It is the way the weak and the wavering review their own conduct, and you must expect to meet with and to bear it.

It is not necessary that I should dwell longer on this dark side of the picture: these difficulties and anxieties attendant on a medical career, or the line of conduct by which they are to be overcome or averted. It will be sufficient for me to say, in all cases of trial or embarrassment, deal openly and high-mindedly with those about you, following the golden

rule, to act as you would wish done, were you and your patient to change positions. Yet never shrink from the responsibility, which science, justice, or humanity imposes on you; for a firm and manly course will prove in the end most advantageous for those under your care, and most successful in winning for yourselves the esteem and confidence of the noble and good.

Gentlemen, you will perceive that I have not drawn on my imagination to paint your prospective career with the seductive allurements of fancy. I have endeavored to set forth the difficulties, the advantages, and the importance of your mission in their true colors. Such as your mission is, it is worthy of, and demands from you, the unceasing exertion of all your energies. I wish that I had the power to inspire you with the intensest zeal in its cultivation; for if you aspire to be anything beyond mediocrity you have even now no time to waste. You should determine to commence the effort at once—this day—this hour.

If we urge you so strongly in the direction in which we know your best interests will be promoted, it is partly from the anxiety with which we shall seek to hear good tidings from you hereafter, and partly on the account of those allied to you by blood and station, who are now looking with deep interest upon you. The distinguished men, as well, who occupy these seats, with the memory of their own early outset into life revived on this occasion all fresh and green, survey you with interest, and with the anxious hope that you may realize our wishes, and, in very truth, each one of you become the good physician. The beauty, fashion, and elegance assembled here, to-day, strangers to you though they may be, have, I make no doubt, from their hearts, those rich storehouses of all kindly feelings, put up their orisons, that you, who go out from us here, to battle for the lives of others with sickness, pestilence, and death, may be protected by Providence, and

stimulated to acquire such a mastery of your art that the sick and the suffering may not appeal to you in vain.

This day—this scene, with its sea of upturned faces—the new emotions that are now stirring within your breasts—the mingled feelings of hope and anxiety with which you look to the future—the newly awakened interest which you can scarcely fail to feel in each other's fortunes, will never be forgotten by you. In after-times, when some of you chance to meet, how vividly your memories will recall this day's events as you wistfully inquire in regard to the fate of your old comrades of the class. What will the tidings be? Who can divine them?

“ And now, farewell, the friends, the faithful-hearted
 Sharers in many a toil and stern employ ;
 Oft will you tell this tale of days departed,
 When the worn graybeard kindles to a boy.”

God's benison be upon you! and may the winds blow kindly, and the sunlight fall cheerily upon your path, as you go forth upon your beneficent mission, to assuage the sufferings and heal the infirmities, of the sick, injured, and afflicted!

